

Containers crush 10 buildings in Lagos, kill woman

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Afeez Hanafi

A middle-aged woman, identified only as Ezinne, was killed on Thursday after some containers on a crane on the premises of a cargo terminal in the Ijora area fell on some buildings. It was gathered that eight other residents were also injured in the incident, which occurred at about 4am.

The corpse of the victim was said to have been deposited at the Lagos State Mainland Hospital mortuary.

Two of the injured persons were treated on the spot, while a woman, Opeyemi James, who was unconscious, was rushed to a

hospital in the area.

It was learnt that the fence of the terminal, which belongs to Sifax Group, borders 20 buildings, 10 of which were said to have been destroyed.

While residents of the area said the incident was caused by the wind that accompanied the downpour of Thursday, the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency said non-observance of safety procedures by the workers of the company was responsible for the occurrence.

An official of LASEMA told our correspondent that the containers were being moved to another spot within the terminal at about 5am, when they suddenly derailed from the crane and crashed into the buildings while the residents were asleep.

It was gathered that the state emergency officials, policemen from the Ijora division and men of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps arrived at the scene after receiving distress calls. Opeyemi's husband, Jide James, who was also injured, said the family lost all its property to the incident.

He said, "We were sleeping when the roof fell on us. My wife fainted. The containers did not have serious impact on our own apartment; so I managed to remove her from the wreckage and she was rushed to a hospital. She is responding to treatment. All our valuables have been destroyed."

Another victim, Nkiruka Ibechukwu, who sells drinks, said she escaped death by a whisker as she had gone to bathe when the tragedy struck.

She said, "The deceased's apartment was beside mine. She was single and lived alone. One of the containers fell directly on her apartment and she was found dead after the container was removed. I don't know her relatives, but she was from Umuahia, Abia State. I was lucky because I was outside, where I had gone to bathe.

"There are 20 buildings here and half of them were destroyed, including mine. I could not pick a single item from my house."

The Managing Director, Lagos State Emergency Management

Agency, Mr. Michael Akindele, said the terminal was not lighted during the operation, adding that further investigation would be conducted into the incident.

He said, "The agency received distress calls concerning containers that fell at Sifax Container Terminal at about 5.30am. Investigation conducted by the agency's emergency response team at the scene of the incident revealed that the containers fell on adjoining illegal buildings due to operational errors during relocation of the containers within the premises overnight.

"Further assessment revealed that operational activities were carried out without floodlights and operational safety procedures. Two adult males sustained injuries and had been treated by the Lagos State Ambulance Service. Unfortunately one adult female was taken out and confirmed dead by the agency."

The Police Public Relations Officer, SP Dolapo Badmos, said whoever was found complicit in the incident would be dealt with according to the law.

She said, "The containers fell on some houses along the railway line. Some people were trapped, while others were rescued and taken to a hospital. If anyone is found culpable, we will invite such for questioning."

The Communication Manager, Sifax Group, Mr. Muyiwa Akande, said the incident was caused by storm, adding that the company was cooperating with the agencies investigating the case.

He said, "Early this morning (Thursday), there was a heavy rainfall accompanied by storm, which caused one of the empty containers to fall off its rack onto the shanties. Immediately the incident happened, the management invited the government agencies and they came to assess the situation. Our company places premium on safety to ensure that all our operational areas are safe. The incident was an act of God.

"We are already working with all the relevant agencies investigating the incident and we shall know the way forward after the investigation. It is premature to attribute what happened to operational errors."

